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Opening extract from

Awfully Beastly Business: Jungle Vampire

Written by

The Beastly Boys

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TONIGHT,

LOOK UP AT THE MOON.

LOOK AT IT CLOSELY.

STARE AT IT.

NOW ASK YOURSELF:

AM I FEELING BRAVE?



CHAPTER ONE

Late one night, on the outskirts of a grimy town, a man in a long fur coat hurried through the rain. He held a black umbrella, hiding his face in shadow as he passed beneath the street lamps and turned down a quiet backstreet. He strode to the door of a warehouse, looked left then right, then knocked three times.

From inside came a voice: 'Who goes there?'

'It's me, you fool,' the man hissed. 'Open up.'

There came a scraping sound of a bolt being slid across. The door squeaked open and in the entrance to the warehouse stood a small man in a ragged suit. 'Sorry, Baron Marackai. You said not to let anyone in.'



'I meant strangers, Blud, you imbecile!'

Baron Marackai barged inside and whacked the small man with his umbrella. 'Well? Is it ready?' he asked.

'Not yet, Sir,' Blud replied.

The Baron looked to the end of the warehouse where a rickety flying machine was being assembled. It had two black wings and an open cockpit with a machine gun mounted to its front. Crawling over it were a dozen Helping Hands, small hand-shaped beasts, clutching spanners, tightening nuts and bolts.

'*Why* isn't it finished?' Baron Marackai yelled. 'It's supposed to be a *quick-assembly* flying machine!'

A big, bearded man was standing at the end of the warehouse holding a long whip. 'The little blighters won't do as they're told, Sir,' he said.

'Then whip them harder, Bone, you wimp!' The Baron marched over and snatched the big man's whip. He cracked it against the knuckles of a Helping Hand. 'Work faster!' he ordered it.

'I don't think they like being whipped, Sir,' Bone said.

'Good,' Baron Marackai replied. He cracked the whip again, even harder. The Helping Hand flinched, then it hurriedly began tightening a row of screws along the wing of the flying machine. Other Helping Hands scuttled to assist it. Two bolted a propeller to the front of the flying machine and more attached wheels to its base.

'That's more like it,' the Baron said. He paced around the machine, inspecting it closely. 'The perfect weapon,' he muttered.

The small man Blud scuttled over and tugged on the Baron's wet fur coat. 'Excuse me, Sir, but why do we need a flying machine?'

The Baron swivelled the gun on its front. 'Because we're going hunting.'

'Hunting for what, Sir?' Blud asked.

The Baron stroked the barrel of the gun. 'We're going hunting for a beast,' he said. 'A beast more terrifying than any you could possibly imagine.' He leant down to Blud, his twisted face grinning. 'And when we find it, we're going to kill it.'

Blud smiled nervously. 'But what about you-know-who, Sir?' he asked.

'Those fools? Pa!' the Baron spat. 'They'll never catch us.' He raised his right hand. There was a small fleshy stump where his little finger was missing. 'Now repeat after me: death to the RSPCB!'

Blud and Bone raised their right hands and turned down their little fingers. 'Death to the RSPCC,' they mumbled.

'The RSPC*B*, you nincompoops!'

The Baron snatched a Helping Hand from the flying machine and slapped it across Blud's face. Then he poked Bone in the eye with its finger. 'Well, don't just stand there! Get ready!' he ordered. 'WE FLY TONIGHT!'